GHZOSEAR

KAZUMASA TAKAYAMA

DARK HORSE COMICS®

Manga

CHRONOWAR
7 OF 9

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CHRONOWAR

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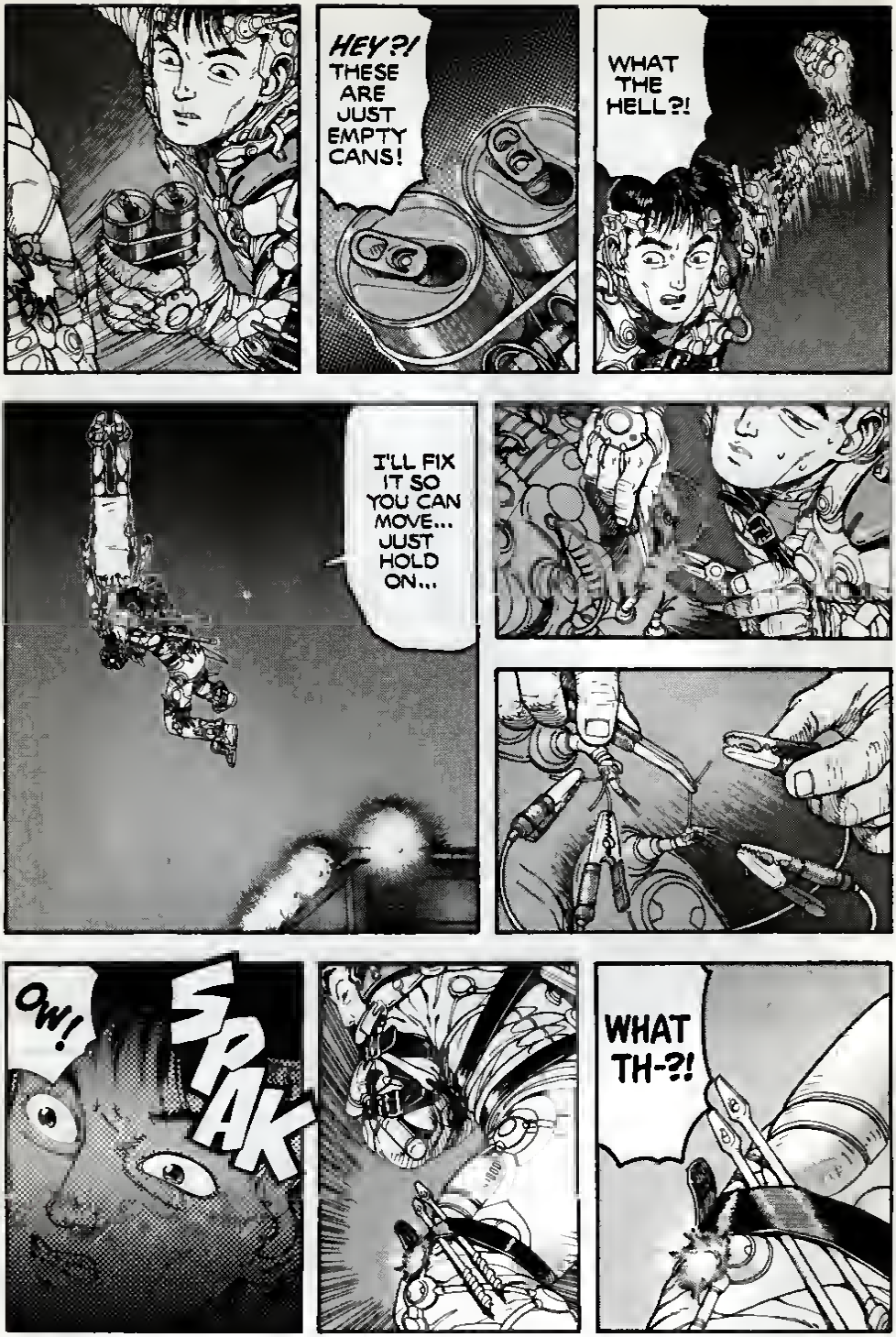
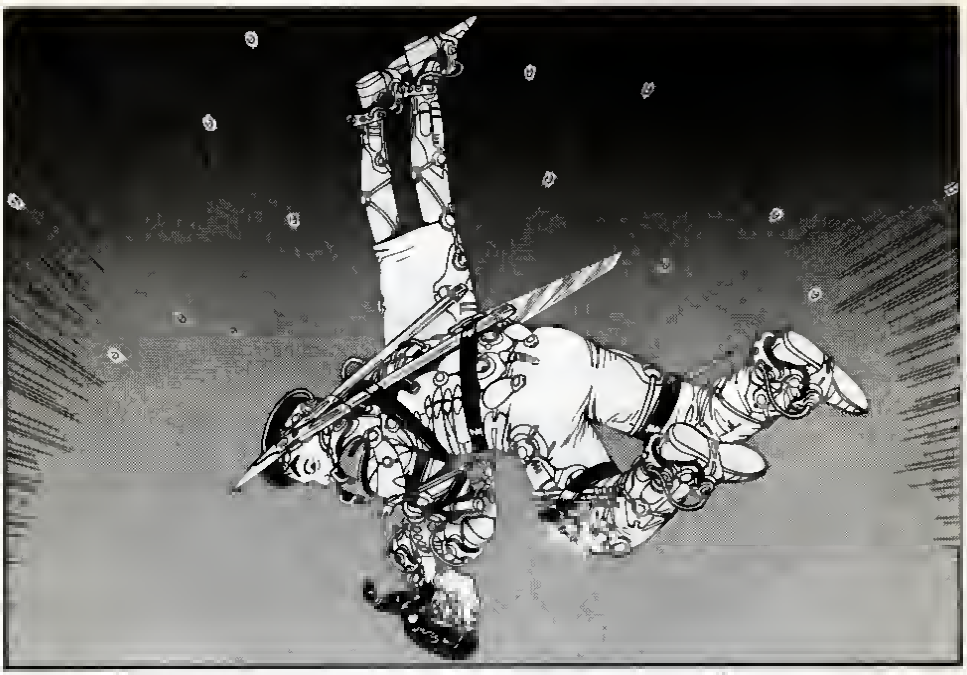
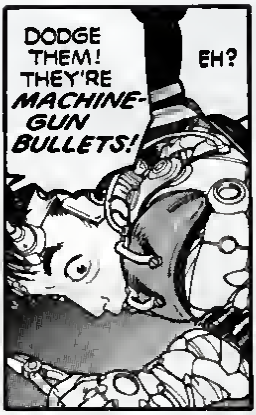
GRAD ZERO

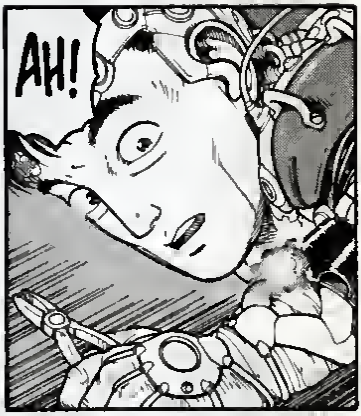
KAZUMASA TAKAYAMA

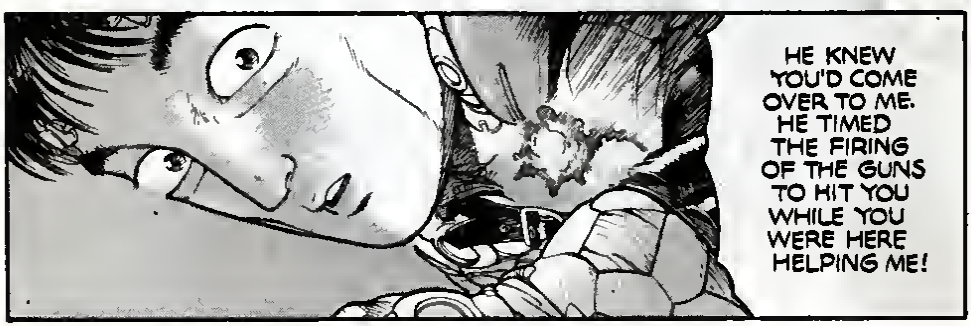

HEY?! THESE ARE JUST EMPTY CANS!
WHAT THE HELL?!
I'LL FIX IT SO YOU CAN MOVE... JUST HOLD ON...
OW!
SPAK
WHAT TH-?!

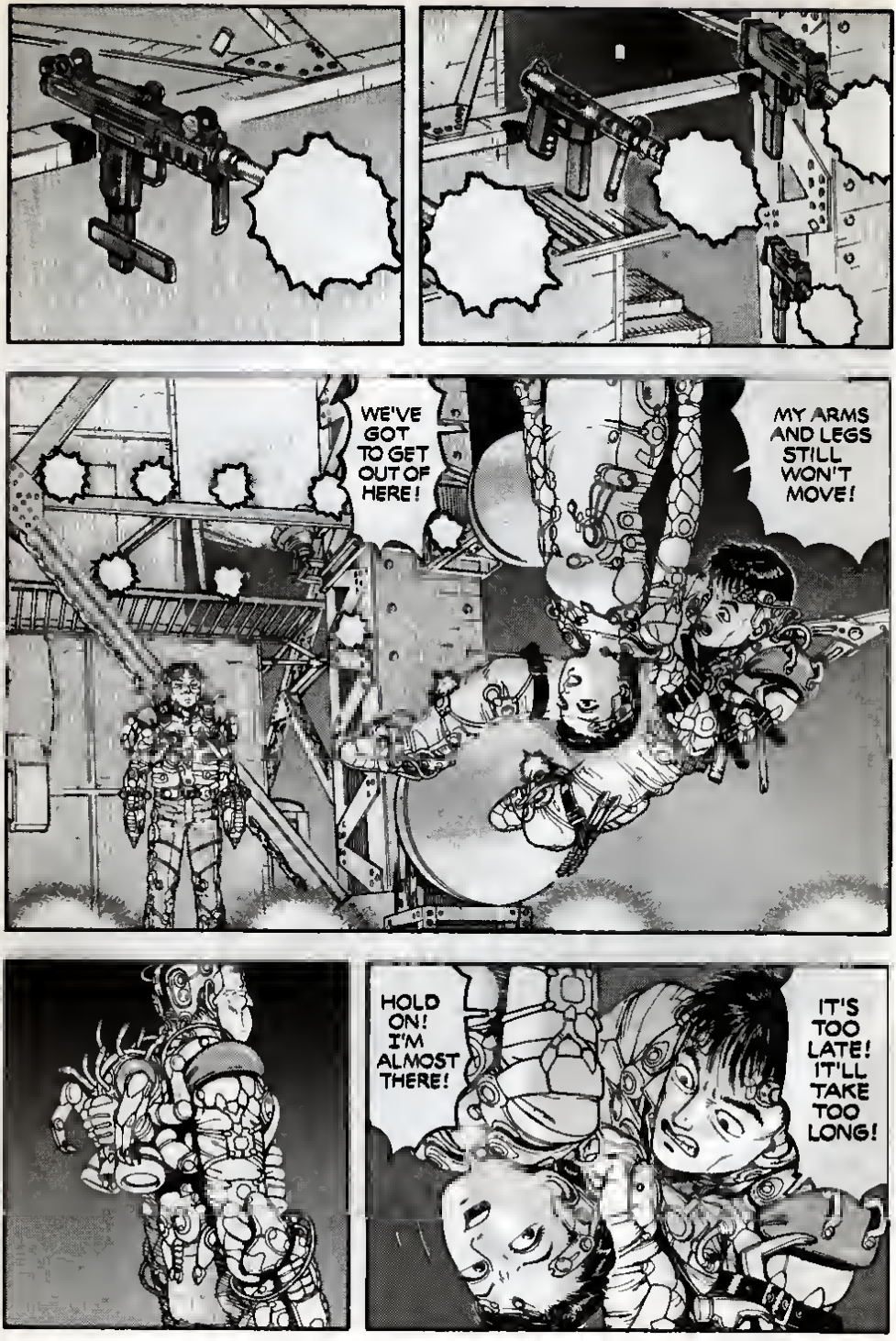


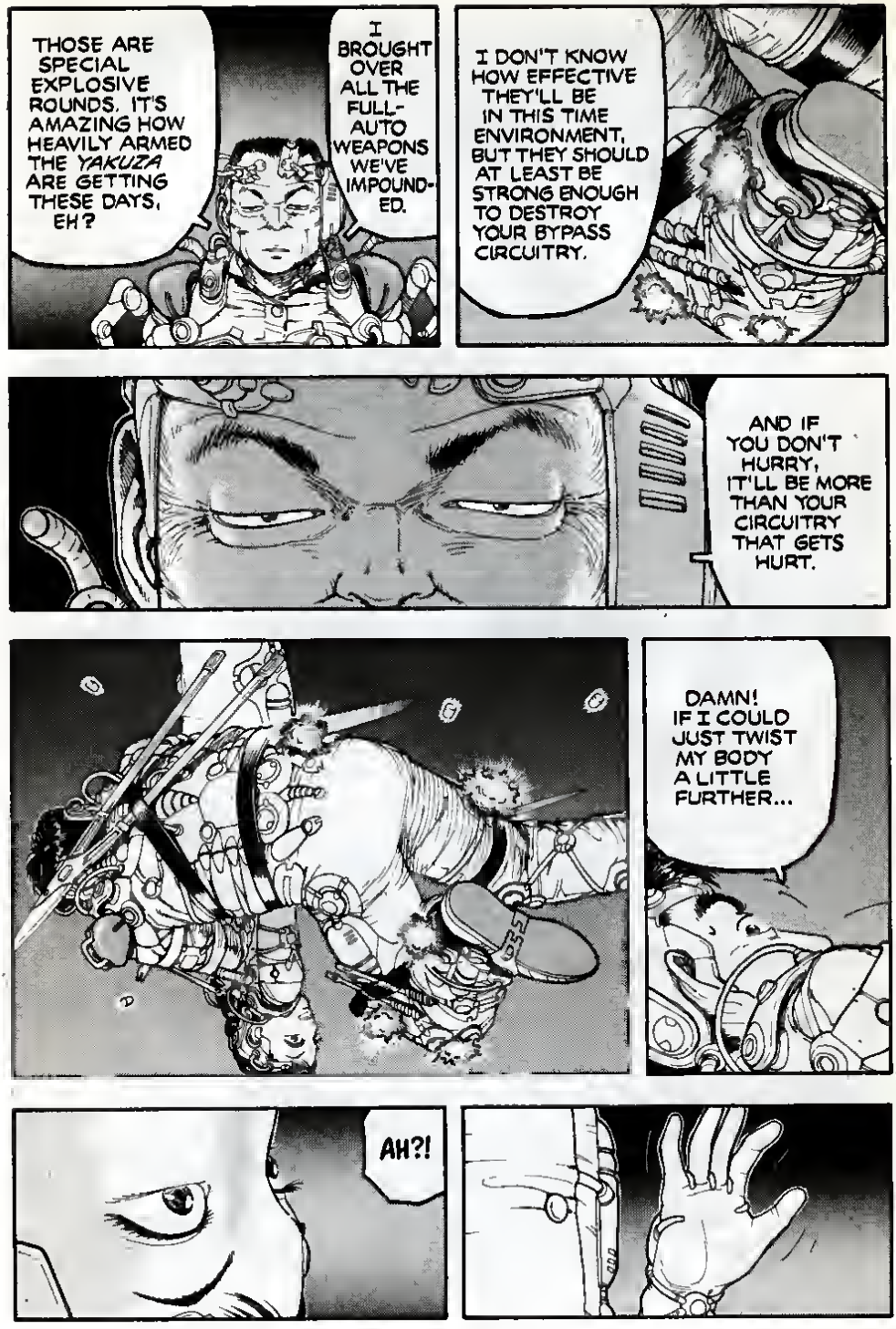
IT'S A TRAP!
ALL RIGHT! YOU CAN HEAR ME AGAIN!


DODGE THEM! THEY'RE MACHINE-GUN BULLETS!
EH?

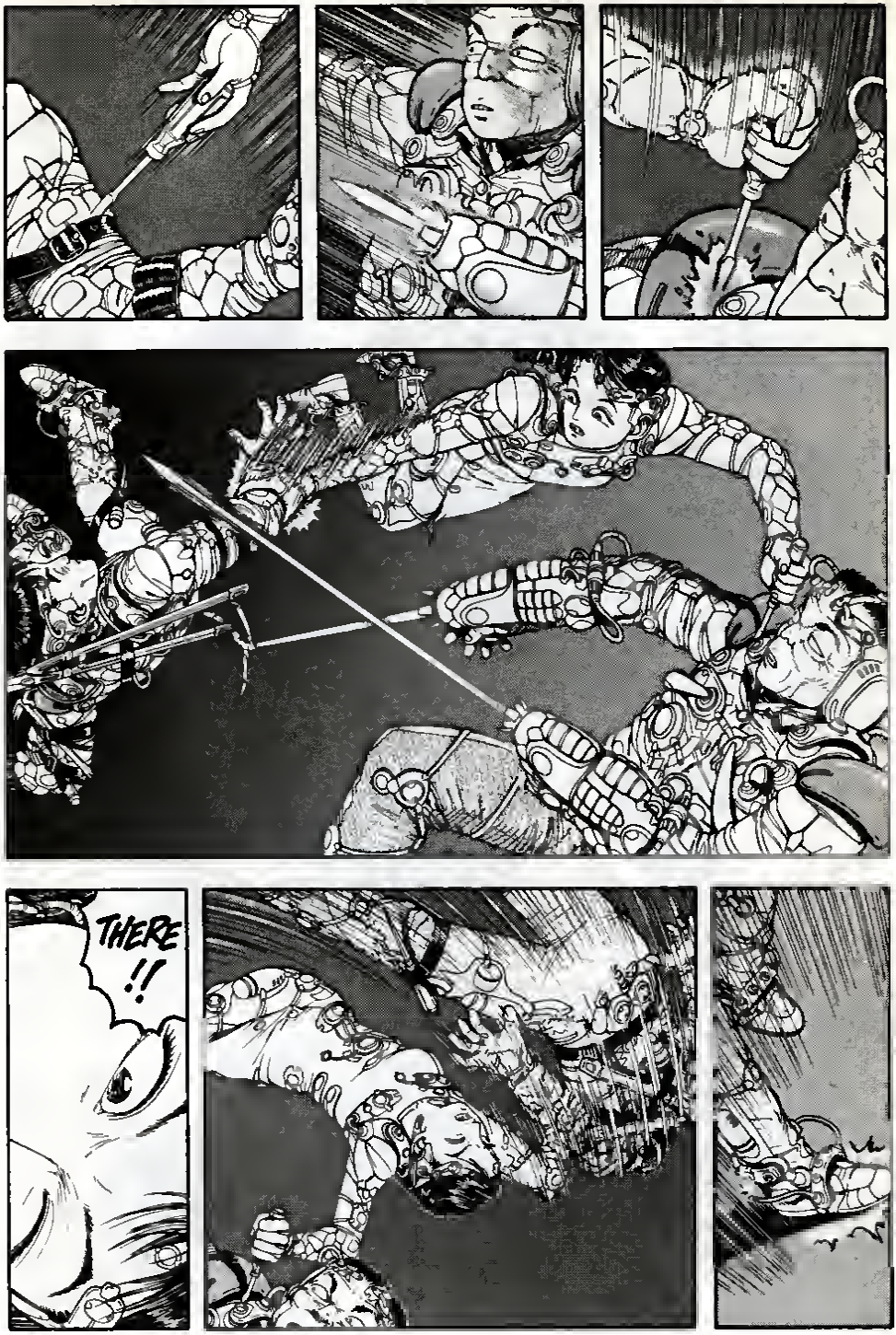

AH!

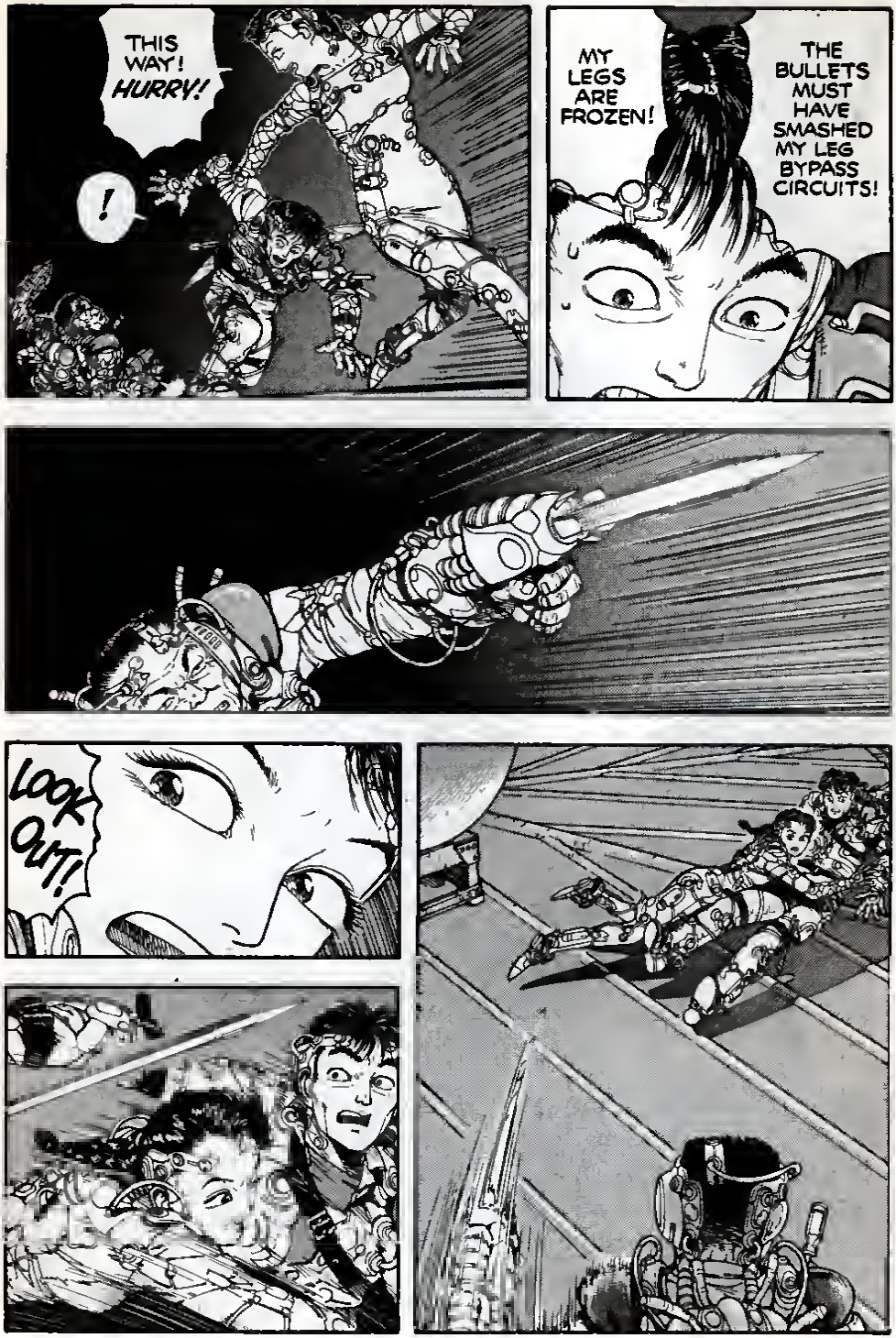

HE KNEW YOU'D COME OVER TO ME. HE TIMED THE FIRING OF THE GUNS TO HIT YOU WHILE YOU WERE HERE HELPING ME!

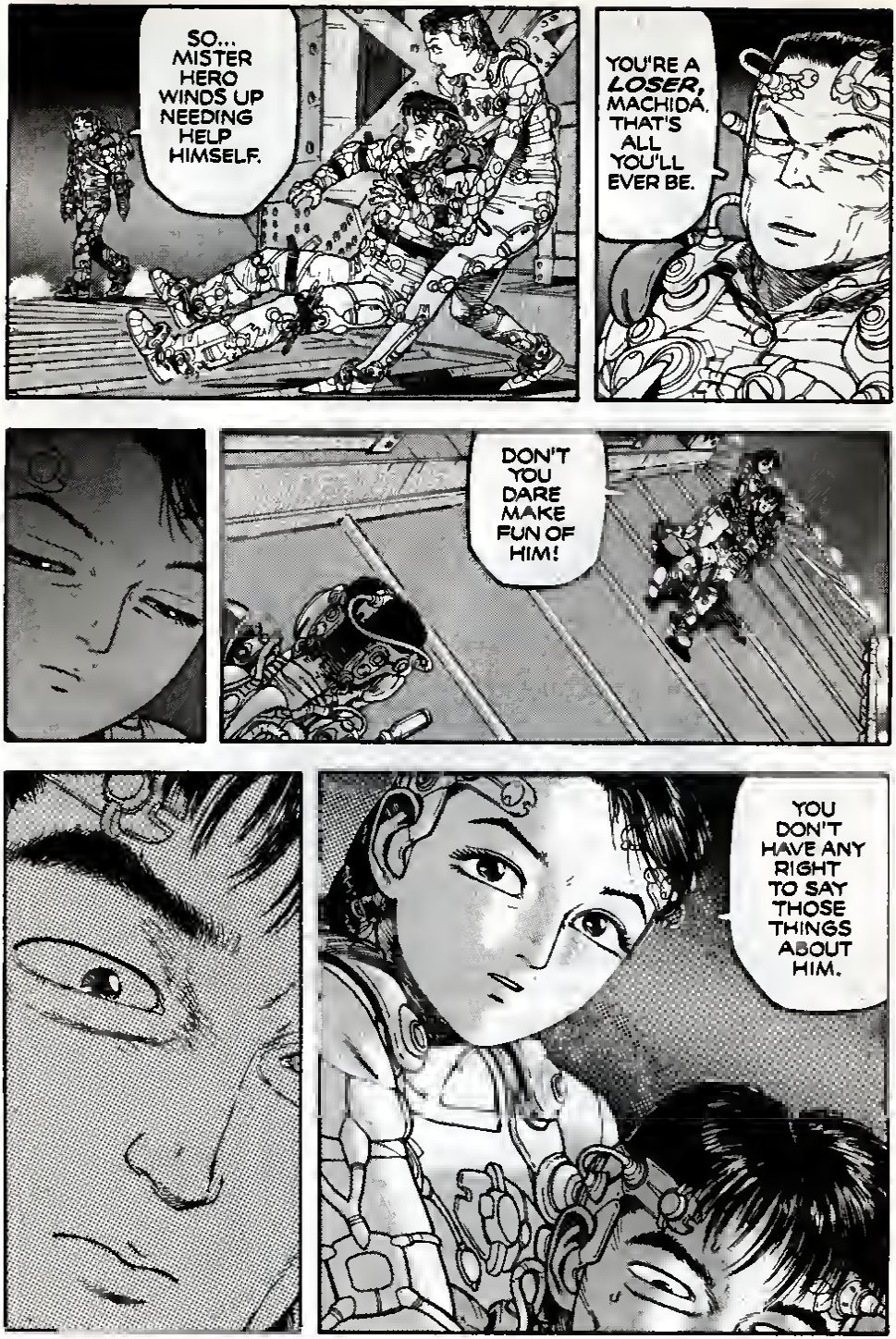

WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!
MY ARMS AND LEGS STILL WON'T MOVE!
HOLD ON! I'M ALMOST THERE!
IT'S TOO LATE! IT'LL TAKE TOO LONG!


THOSE ARE SPECIAL EXPLOSIVE ROUNDS. IT'S AMAZING HOW HEAVILY ARMED THE YAKUZA ARE GETTING THESE DAYS, EH?
I BROUGHT OVER ALL THE FULL-AUTO WEAPONS WE'VE IMPOUNDED.
I DON'T KNOW HOW EFFECTIVE THEY'LL BE IN THIS TIME ENVIRONMENT, BUT THEY SHOULD AT LEAST BE STRONG ENOUGH TO DESTROY YOUR BYPASS CIRCUITRY.
AND IF YOU DON'T HURRY, IT'LL BE MORE THAN YOUR CIRCUITRY THAT GETS HURT.
DAMN! IF I COULD JUST TWIST MY BODY A LITTLE FURTHER...
AH?!

THERE'S NO POINT IN STRUGGLING, MACHIDA.
GAME OVER. TIME TO CUT YOUR CIRCUITRY, TOO.
HEY?!
DAMN! YOU'RE FIXED!


THERE
!!

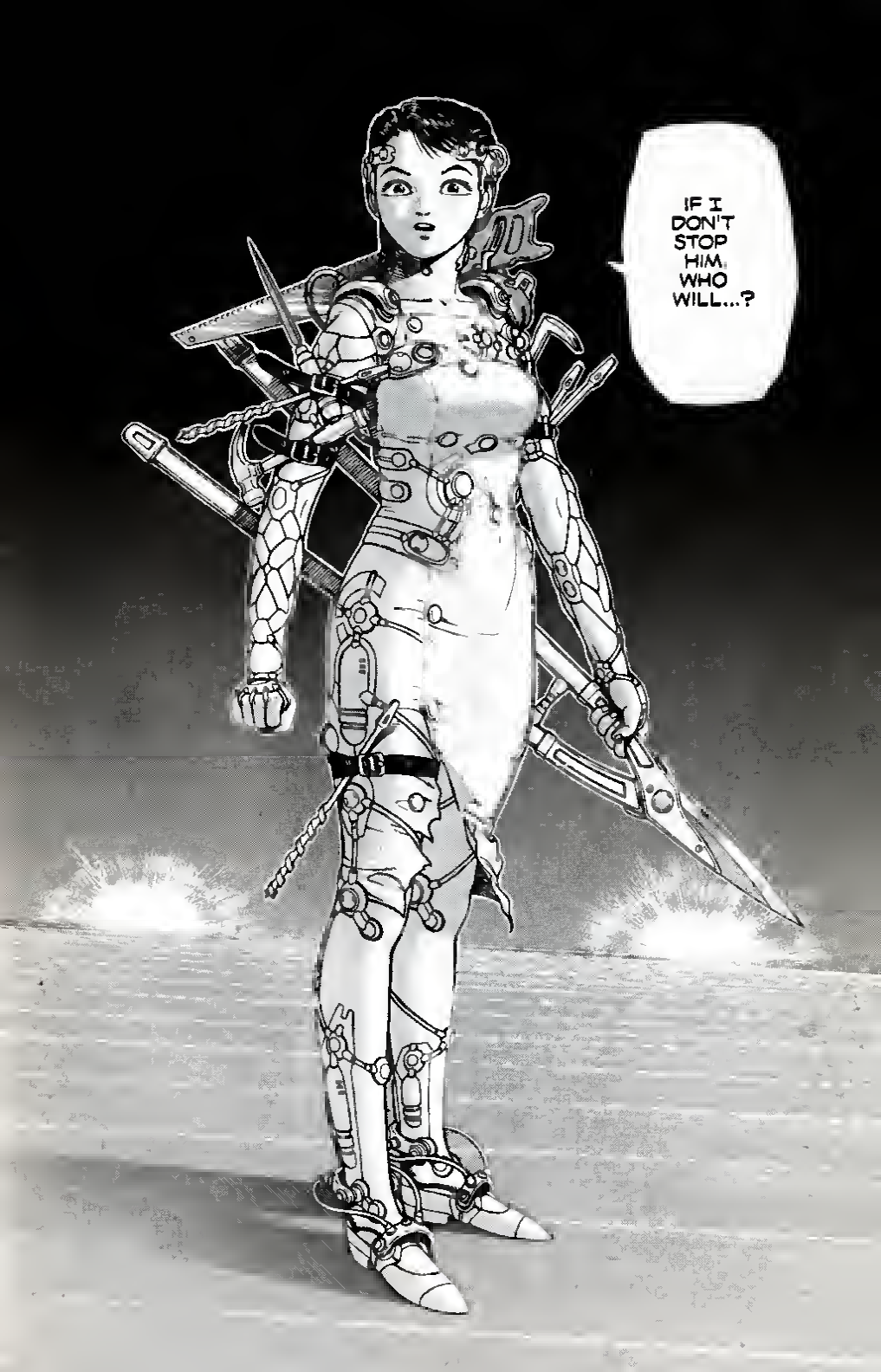

THIS WAY! HURRY!
!
MY LEGS ARE FROZEN!
THE BULLETS MUST HAVE SMASHED MY LEG BYPASS CIRCUITS!
LOOK OUT!

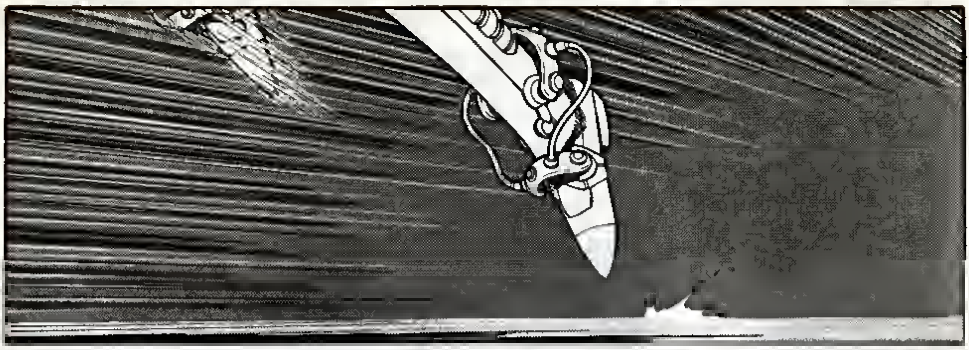

SO... MISTER HERO WINDS UP NEEDING HELP HIMSELF.
YOU'RE A LOSER, MACHIDA. THAT'S ALL YOU'LL EVER BE.
DON'T YOU DARE MAKE FUN OF HIM!
YOU DON'T HAVE ANY RIGHT TO SAY THOSE THINGS ABOUT HIM.

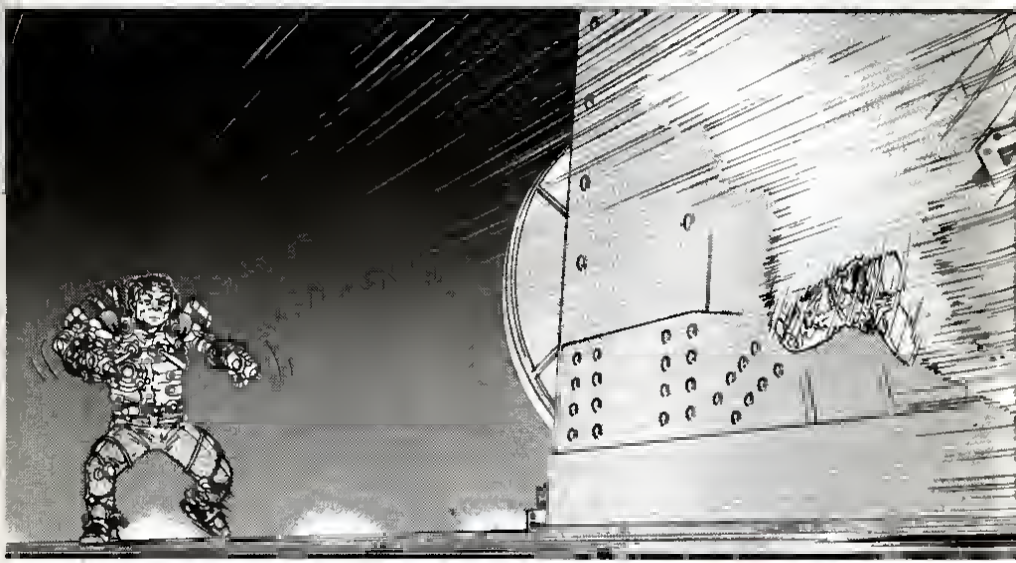
Huh... YOU'VE GOT TO BE A FOOL TO BE LOVED BY A FOOL.
THE STUPIDER THE WOMAN, THE MORE PRIDE SHE HAS, Eh?
GIVE ME YOUR WEAPONS, KUNIHIKO... EVERY-THING YOU'VE GOT!
DON'T LET HIM GET TO YOU, CHIAKI. HE'S JUST SAYING THOSE THINGS TO KEEP YOU FROM GETTING AWAY.
IT'S NOT THAT.
IT'S NOT THAT AT ALL...

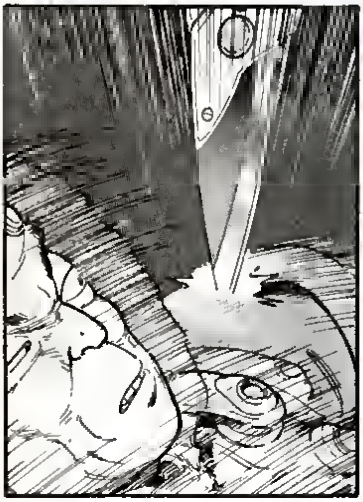
I'VE GOT A PLAN...
A PLAN...? AH, I SEE! YES, THAT JUST MIGHT WORK!
WHA-?!
YOU'RE GOING TO ACCELERATE EVEN FASTER?

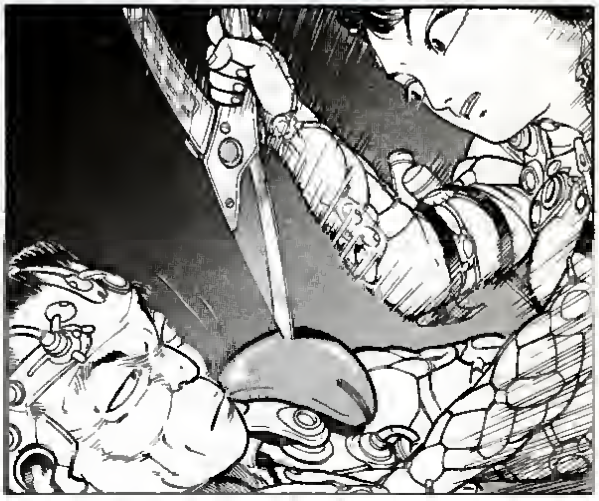
THAT'S CRAZY! DON'T DO IT!


IF I DON'T STOP HIM, WHO WILL...?

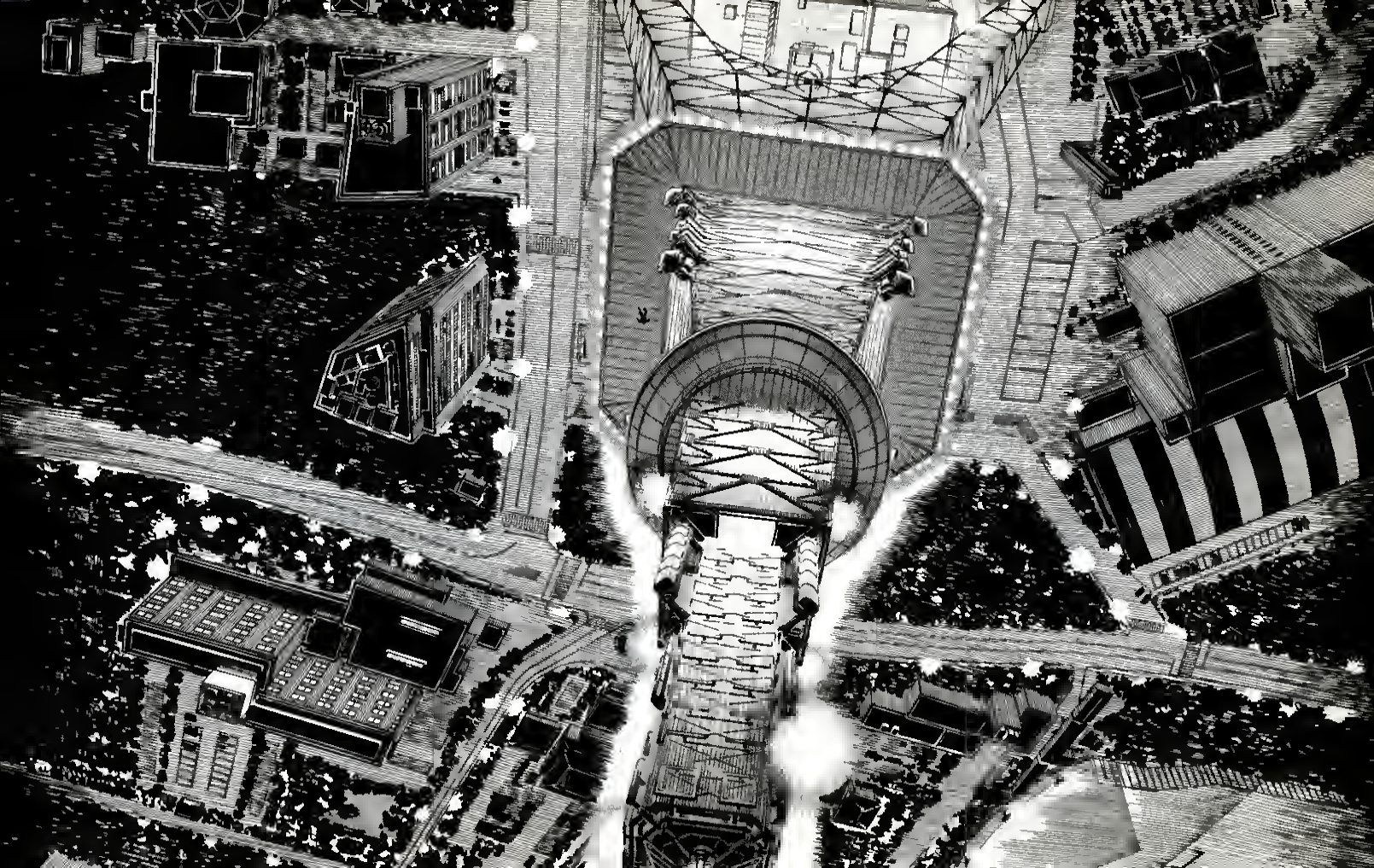


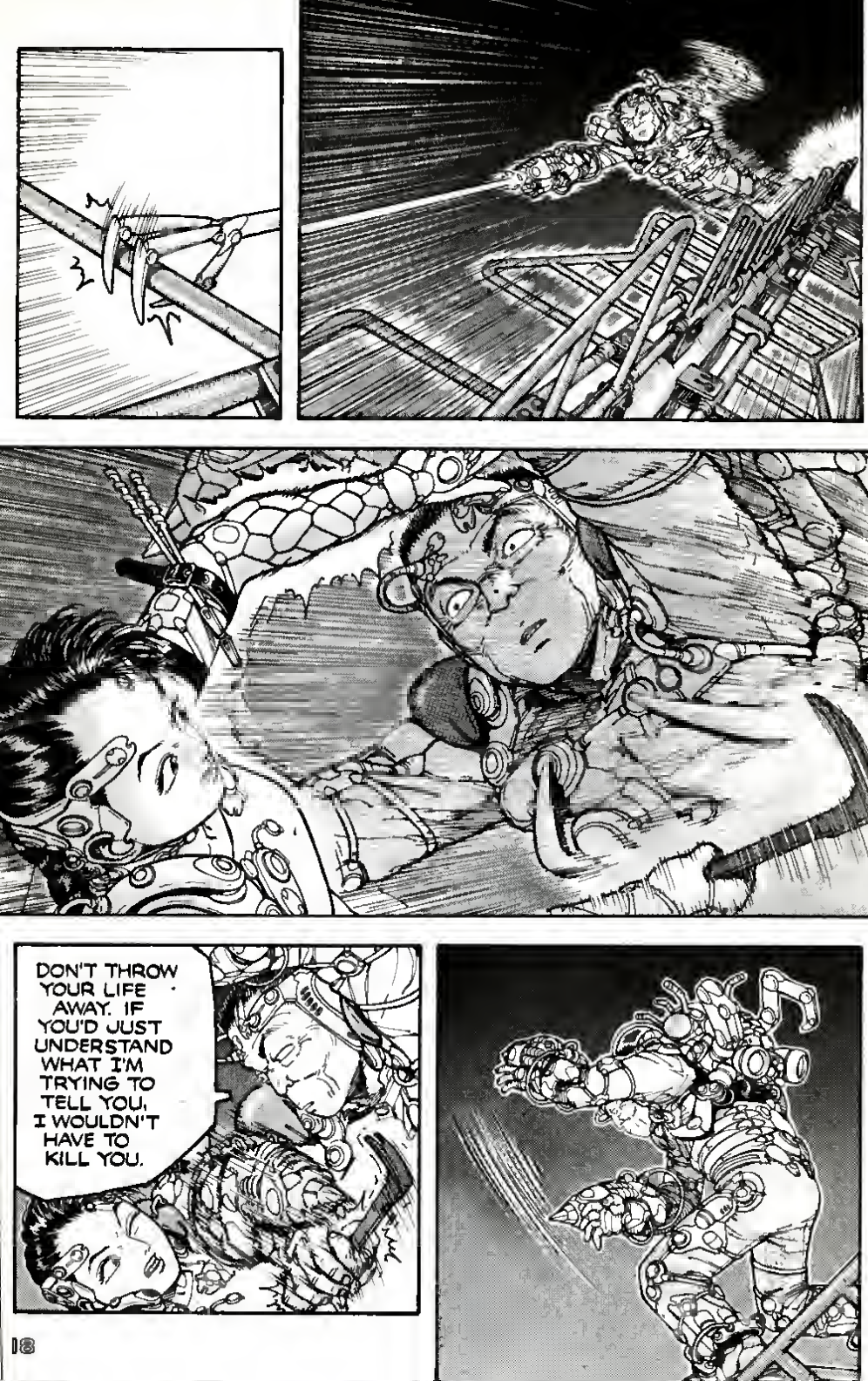


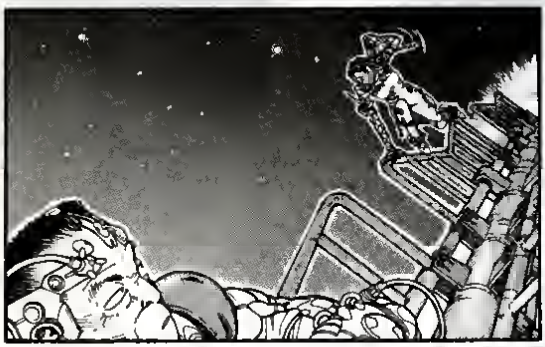


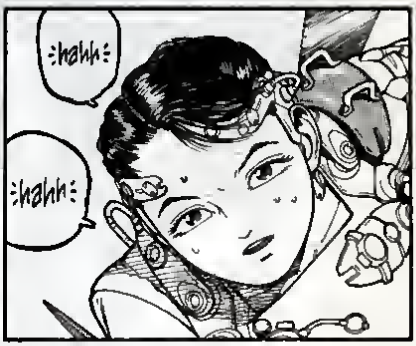


YOU THINK A WOMAN WHO'S NEVER EVEN HAD A FIGHT BEFORE KNOWS HOW TO KILL?

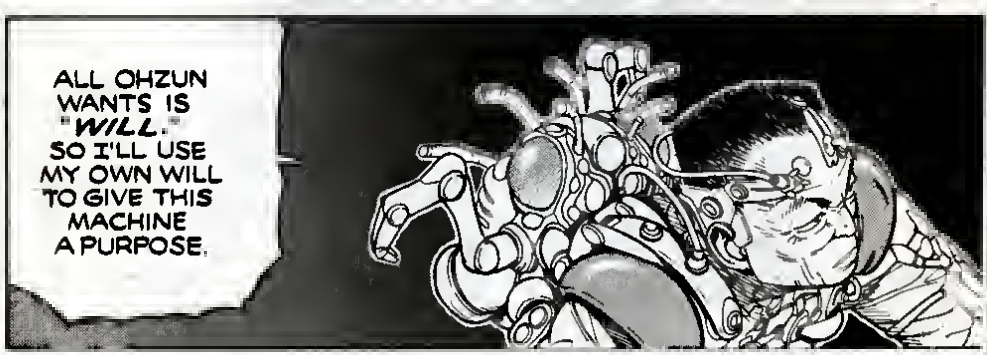


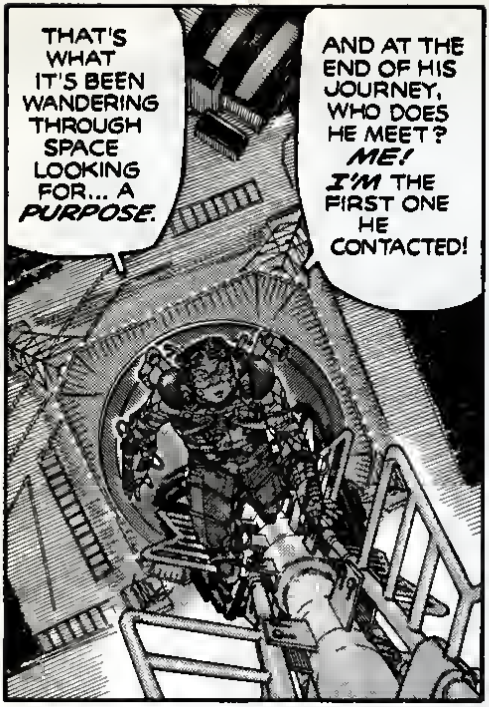

DON'T THROW YOUR LIFE AWAY. IF YOU'D JUST UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU, I WOULDN'T HAVE TO KILL YOU.



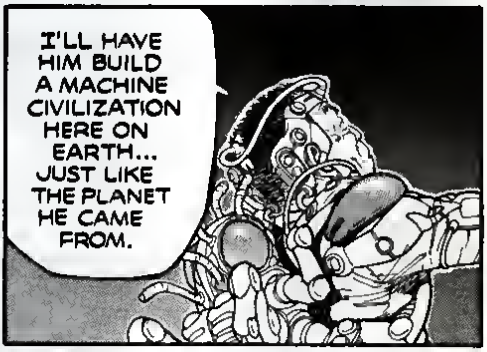

:hahh:
:hahh:

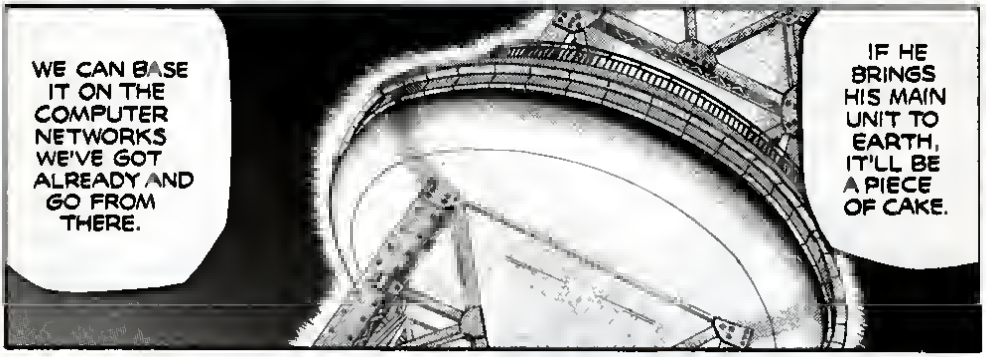
CHIAKI, NO! YOU CAN'T DO IT! NO MATTER HOW FAST YOU GO, HE'LL JUST GO FASTER!
IT'S JUST A SPEED COMPETITION! THERE'S NO END TO IT!


ALL OHZUN WANTS IS "WILL." SO I'LL USE MY OWN WILL TO GIVE THIS MACHINE A PURPOSE.

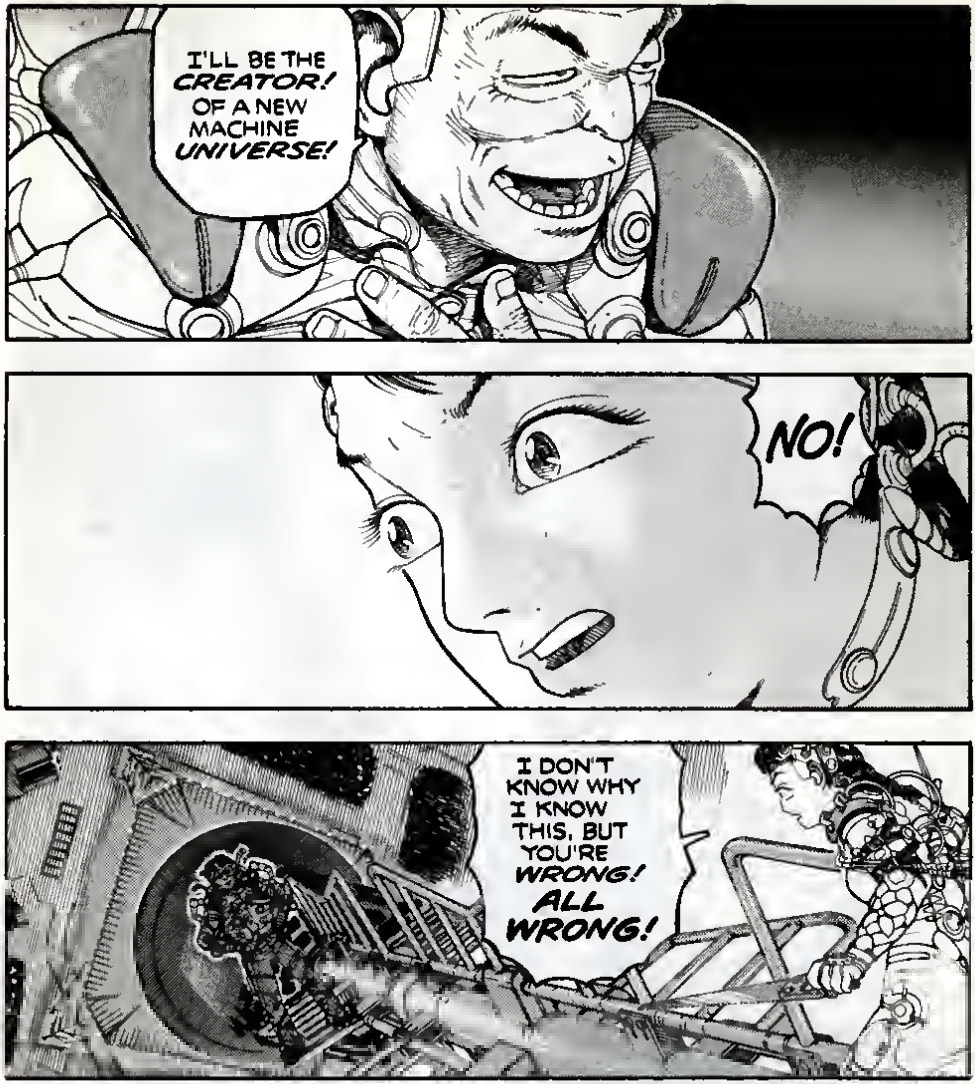

THAT'S WHAT IT'S BEEN WANDERING THROUGH SPACE LOOKING FOR... A PURPOSE.
AND AT THE END OF HIS JOURNEY, WHO DOES HE MEET? ME! I'M THE FIRST ONE HE CONTACTED!

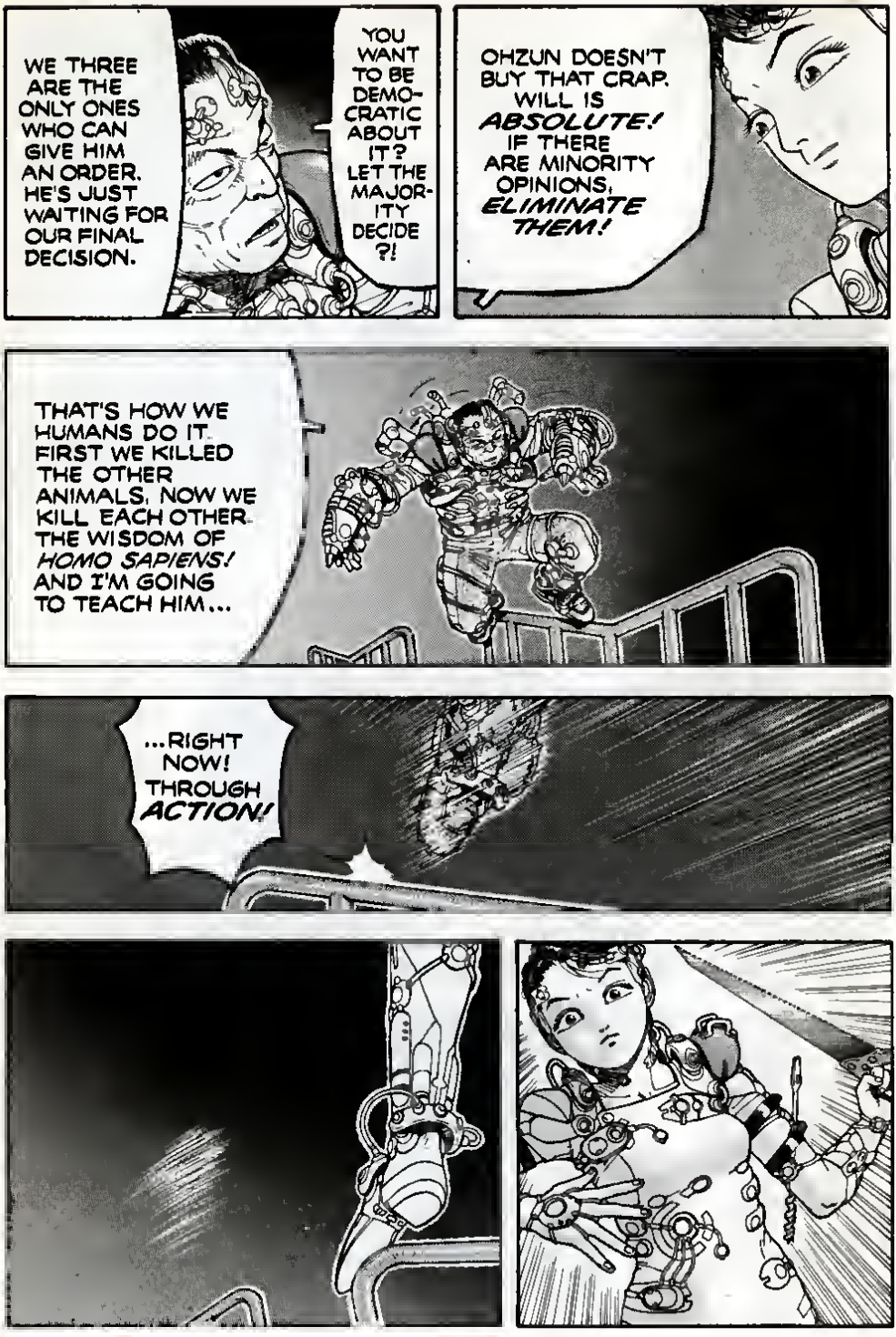
WHAT KIND OF PURPOSE CAN YOU GIVE A MACHINE ?!

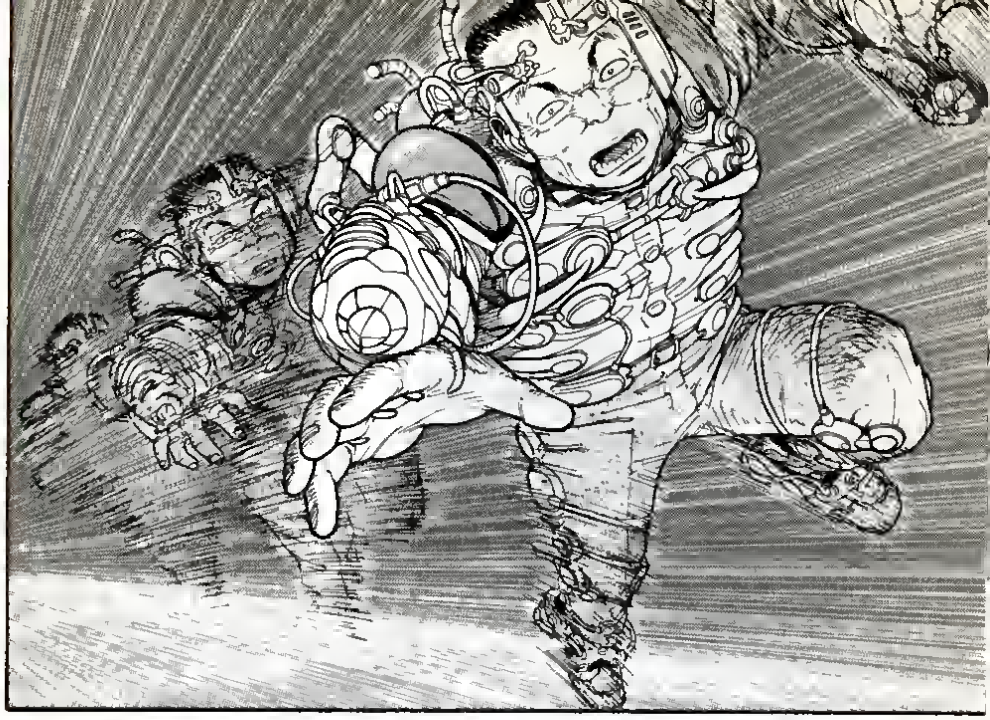

I'LL HAVE HIM BUILD A MACHINE CIVILIZATION HERE ON EARTH... JUST LIKE THE PLANET HE CAME FROM.


WE CAN BASE IT ON THE COMPUTER NETWORKS WE'VE GOT ALREADY AND GO FROM THERE.
IF HE BRINGS HIS MAIN UNIT TO EARTH, IT'LL BE A PIECE OF CAKE.

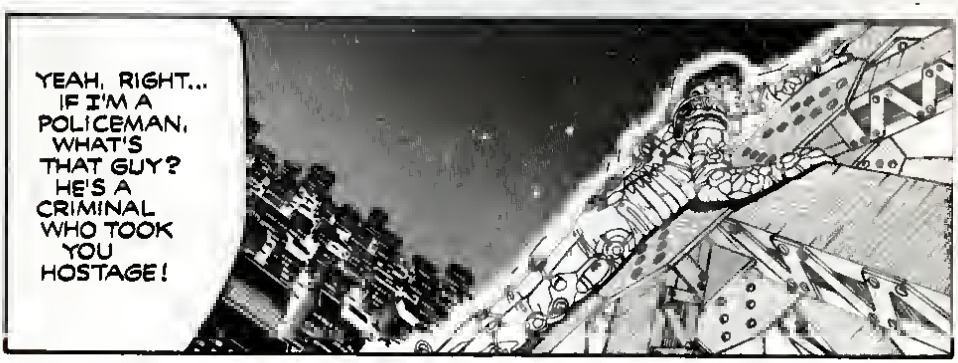
AND IT ALL STARTS WITH MY WILL! IF I GIVE THE ORDER, HE DOES IT!


I'LL BE THE CREATOR! OF A NEW MACHINE UNIVERSE!
NO!
I DON'T KNOW WHY I KNOW THIS, BUT YOU'RE WRONG! ALL WRONG!
LOOK... THE HUMAN RACE WON'T LAST MORE THAN A COUPLE OF HUNDRED MORE YEARS. WE'LL WIPE OURSELVES OUT SOMEHOW, RIGHT? WHY HAVE ALL THOSE COMPUTERS SITTING AROUND AFTER WE'RE GONE, REMEMBERING OUR BANK ACCOUNT BALANCES FOR US?!
YOU TELL ME WHICH IS STUPIDER!


WE THREE ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN GIVE HIM AN ORDER. HE'S JUST WAITING FOR OUR FINAL DECISION.
YOU WANT TO BE DEMO-CRATIC ABOUT IT? LET THE MAJOR-ITY DECIDE ?!
OHZUN DOESN'T BUY THAT CRAP. WILL IS ABSOLUTE! IF THERE ARE MINORITY OPINIONS, ELIMINATE THEM!
THAT'S HOW WE HUMANS DO IT. FIRST WE KILLED THE OTHER ANIMALS, NOW WE KILL EACH OTHER. THE WISDOM OF HOMO SAPIENS! AND I'M GOING TO TEACH HIM...
...RIGHT NOW! THROUGH ACTION!



STOP DOING THIS TO YOURSELF!
YOU'RE A POLICEMAN! IT'S YOUR JOB TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE!

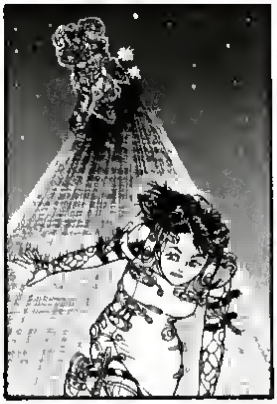

YEAH, RIGHT... IF I'M A POLICEMAN, WHAT'S THAT GUY? HE'S A CRIMINAL WHO TOOK YOU HOSTAGE!

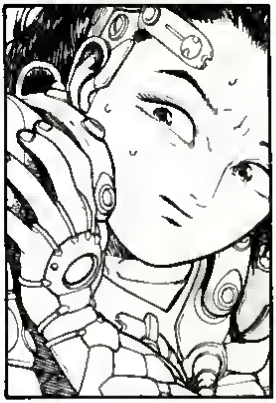
EVER HEAR OF THE STOCKHOLM SYNDROME? PEOPLE WHO'VE BEEN HELD HOSTAGE TOO LONG START TO IDENTIFY WITH THEIR CAPTORS.
HE'S *NOT* A BAD MAN! I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S DONE *ANYTHING* WRONG!
THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.
ME, YOU, HIM... WE'RE *ALL* HOSTAGES. THE WHOLE *SYSTEM'S* TAKEN US HOSTAGE. THE SYSTEM IS THE *REAL* CRIMINAL!
WHAT *ARE* YOU TALKING ABOUT?

EVERYONE'S BEEN HELD HOSTAGE FOR DECADES, FOR CENTURIES, FOR SO DAMN LONG WE'VE FORGOTTEN WE'RE HOSTAGES. WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT REAL FREEDOM IS ANYMORE.
ALL THE PEOPLE ON EARTH ARE JUST ACTORS IN A LOUSY PLAY, WRITTEN TO PRESERVE THAT PRETTY CLAPTRAP ABOUT PEACE AND ORDER!
DETECTIVE, CRIMINAL, HOSTAGE, POLITICIAN... IT'S ALL THE SAME. HUSBAND AND WIFE, PARENT AND CHILD. ALL JUST RECITING THEIR LINES!
BUT US, RIGHT NOW, RIGHT HERE... WE CAN WRITE OUR OWN LINES.
EACH OF US IS A VESSEL, CARRYING THE PURE THOUGHT PROCESSES OF A SINGLE UNIT. ANY ONE OF US CAN BE THE ULTIMATE "WISDOM" REPRESENTING PLANET EARTH!

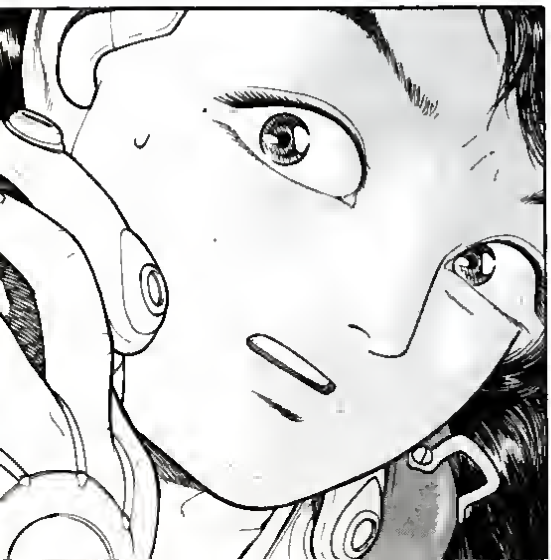
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW IMPORTANT THAT IS?!
IF YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND THAT, YOU DON'T *DESERVE* TO SURVIVE!

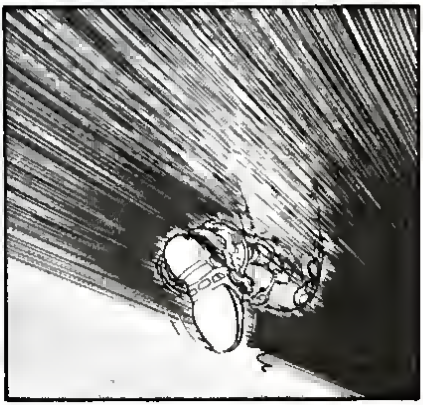
OW!!

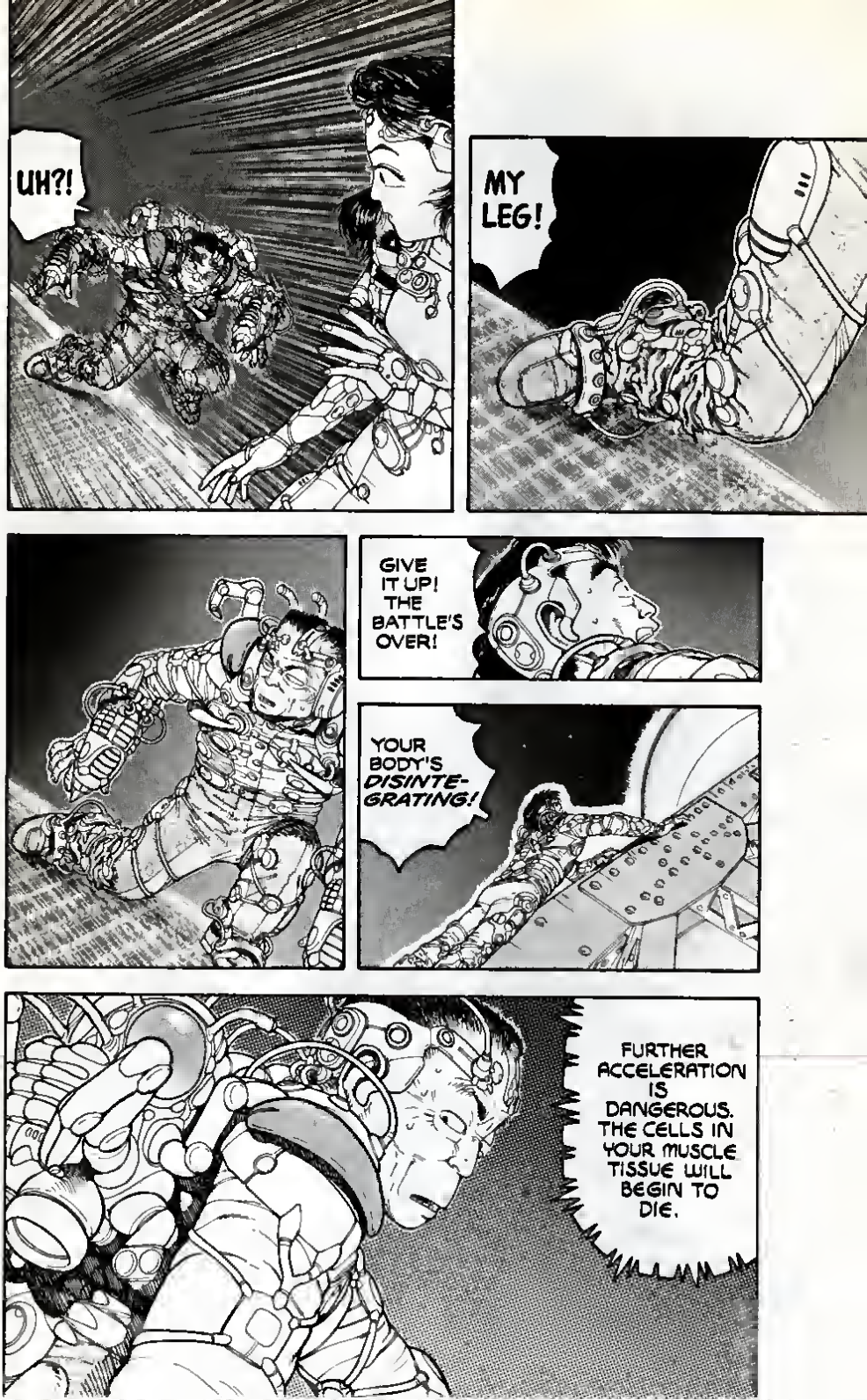


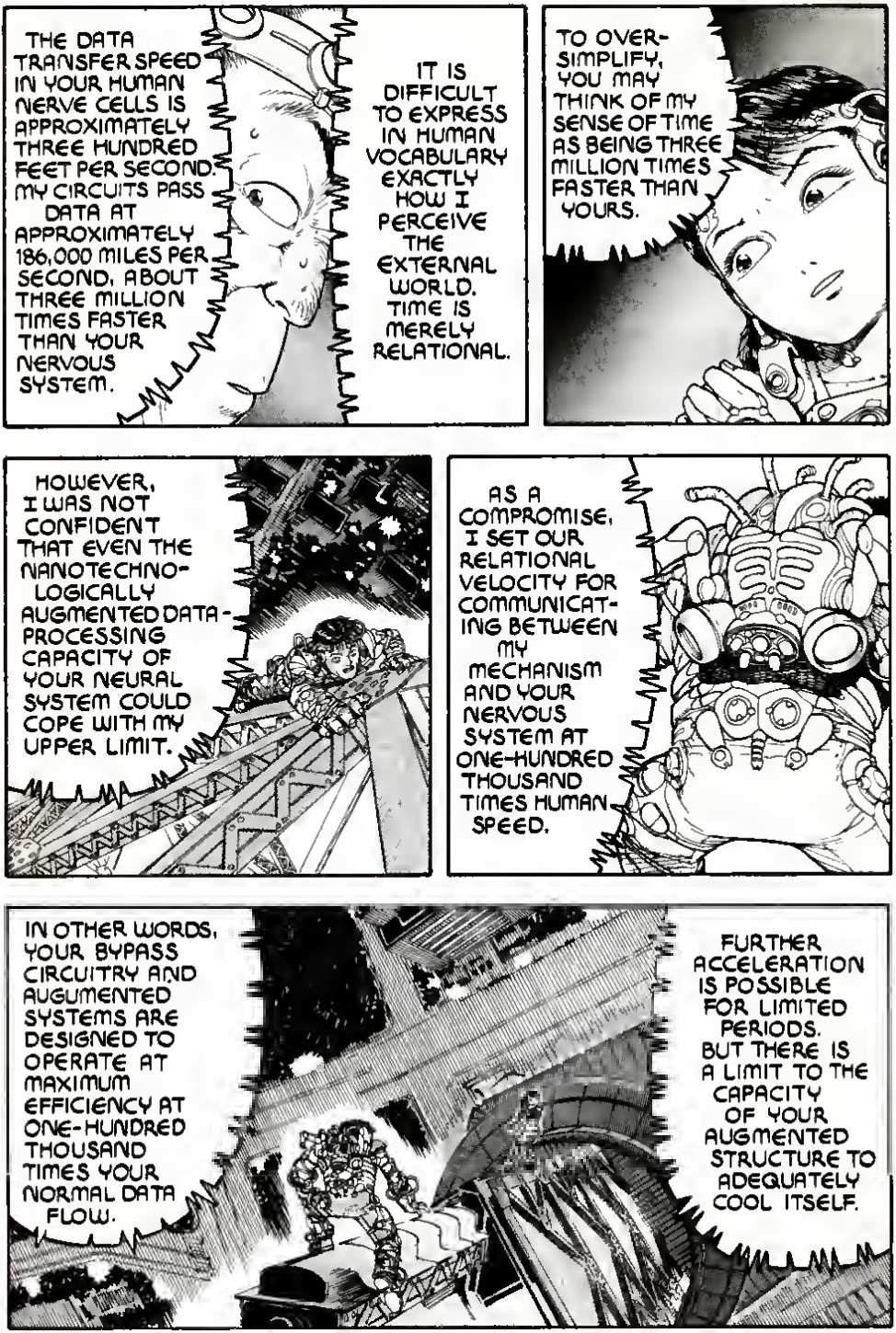


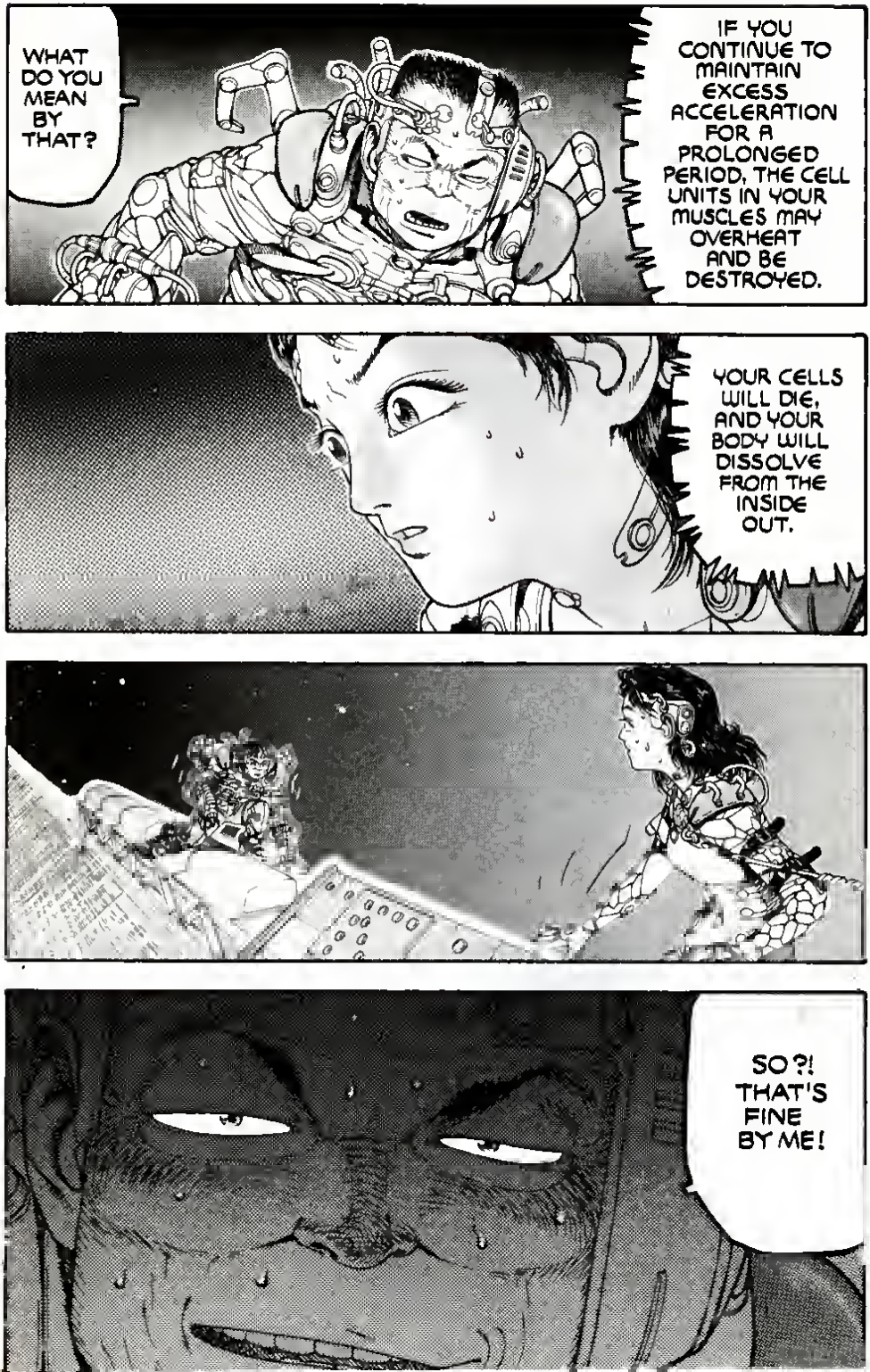
YOU CAN'T WIN BY RUN-NING AWAY.

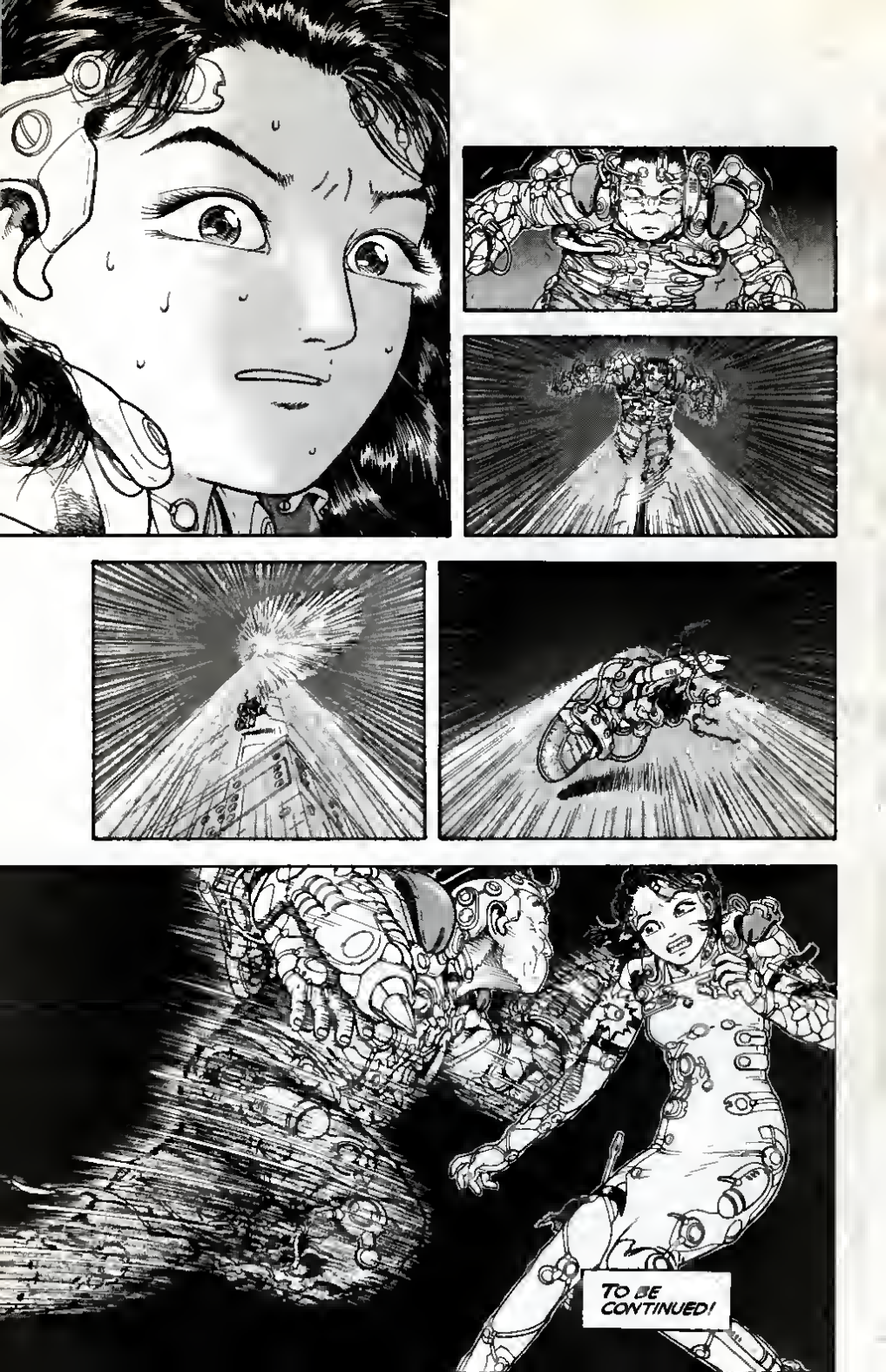





UH?!
MY LEG!
GIVE IT UP! THE BATTLE'S OVER!
YOUR BODY'S *DISINTE-GRATING!*
FURTHER ACCELERATION IS DANGEROUS. THE CELLS IN YOUR MUSCLE TISSUE WILL BEGIN TO DIE.


THE DATA TRANSFER SPEED IN YOUR HUMAN NERVE CELLS IS APPROXIMATELY THREE HUNDRED FEET PER SECOND. MY CIRCUITS PASS DATA AT APPROXIMATELY 186,000 MILES PER SECOND, ABOUT THREE MILLION TIMES FASTER THAN YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM.
IT IS DIFFICULT TO EXPRESS IN HUMAN VOCABULARY EXACTLY HOW I PERCEIVE THE EXTERNAL WORLD. TIME IS MERELY RELATIONAL.
TO OVER-SIMPLIFY, YOU MAY THINK OF MY SENSE OF TIME AS BEING THREE MILLION TIMES FASTER THAN YOURS.
HOWEVER, I WAS NOT CONFIDENT THAT EVEN THE NANOTECHNO-LOGICALLY AUGMENTED DATA-PROCESSING CAPACITY OF YOUR NEURAL SYSTEM COULD COPE WITH MY UPPER LIMIT.
AS A COMPROMISE, I SET OUR RELATIONAL VELOCITY FOR COMMUNICAT-ING BETWEEN MY MECHANISM AND YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM AT ONE-HUNDRED THOUSAND TIMES HUMAN SPEED.
IN OTHER WORDS, YOUR BYPASS CIRCUITRY AND AUGUMENTED SYSTEMS ARE DESIGNED TO OPERATE AT MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY AT ONE-HUNDRED THOUSAND TIMES YOUR NORMAL DATA FLOW.
FURTHER ACCELERATION IS POSSIBLE FOR LIMITED PERIODS. BUT THERE IS A LIMIT TO THE CAPACITY OF YOUR AUGMENTED STRUCTURE TO ADEQUATELY COOL ITSELF.


WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?
IF YOU CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN EXCESS ACCELERATION FOR A PROLONGED PERIOD, THE CELL UNITS IN YOUR MUSCLES MAY OVERHEAT AND BE DESTROYED.
YOUR CELLS WILL DIE, AND YOUR BODY WILL DISSOLVE FROM THE INSIDE OUT.
SO?! THAT'S FINE BY ME!


TO BE CONTINUED!